

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIEV 000593

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2016

TAGS: PTER PREL

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR HOLDS CTAG, DISCUSSES GAS DEAL, IRAN

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Russian Ambassador Viktor Chernomyrdin told a G-8(ish: see para 2) Counter-Terrorism Action Group gathering February 13 that he assessed the terrorist threat in Ukraine as low, but the Russian government had some concern over the presence of Chechen separatists on the Crimean peninsula and the possibility of separatist agitation among the Crimean Tatar community. Ambassador Herbst observed that Crimean Tatars observed a moderate form of Islam and instead highlighted concerns over the activities of the Islamic community organization, Arraid. Chernomyrdin blamed Ukraine for precipitating the natural gas crisis with Russia, while his guests expressed concern over the non-transparent involvement of RosUkrEnergo. When Chernomyrdin implied the U.S. was responsible for the current nuclear dispute with Iran, Ambassador noted Russia's own culpability in providing Iran nuclear technology. End summary.

12. (U) Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin invited a group of ambassadors to lunch February 13 in response to Russian MFA instructions to its embassies in countries of the former Soviet Union to hold a G-8 Counter-Terrorism Action Group (CTAG) session. Despite the rationale, the gathering did not include the Japanese but did include the Swiss and Spanish ambassadors.

Low Terrorism Threat

13. (C) Chernomyrdin noted that G-8 countries had a common interest in combating the terrorism threat but the possibility of a significant terrorist action in Ukraine was fairly low. Cooperation between the Ukrainian and Russian governments in combating the terrorism potential was good. On the law enforcement front, the Russian government was more concerned about the trafficking of narcotics originating in Europe and crossing Ukraine into Russia. The Swiss ambassador agreed, saying that his government was also concerned about narcotics trafficking through Ukraine. Chernomyrdin said the Russian government was also mindful of the presence of Chechen separatists in Ukraine. He claimed that Chechen separatists found the Crimean peninsula a convenient refuge for rest and recuperation. The Russian government also had some concern that the Crimean Tatar community had some interest in gaining further political autonomy or something more.

14. (C) Ambassador responded that Tatars had not been a problem in Ukraine. By and large, Crimean Tatars observed a moderate form of Islam. Of greater concern was the Muslim community organization Arraid (Ukrainian Muslim Interregional Association of Civic Organizations), which received financial and political support from Arab states of the Persian Gulf and manifested some anti-West, radical Islamic tendencies. When officials from those countries visited Ukraine, for example, they would meet with Arraid, but not with the more moderate Grand Mufti of Ukraine (who is of Lebanese origin). Another concern was the possibility that Hizb ut-Tahrir might make inroads on the Crimean peninsula. (Comment: Chernomyrdin's evocation of an alleged Crimean Tatar separatist threat is also off-base given that the real agitators for Crimean separatism -- such as the group Proryv (Breakthrough), which set up a mock border post between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine in mid-January -- tend to be ethnic Russians, advocate reunification with Russia and are believed by Ukrainian officials and experts to be funded/directed by the Russian FSB intelligence service.)

Natural Gas Arrangements

15. (C) Chernomyrdin blamed Ukrainians for forcing the recent crisis that led to new arrangements under which Russia would supply natural gas to Ukraine with the March 2005 GOU decision to renegotiate gas supply arrangements. The Ukrainians had never seriously addressed the issue until the final weeks of 2005, Chernomyrdin charged. The German ambassador said his and other EU governments had serious reservations about the enhanced role for gas supply middleman RosUkrEnergo. Chernomyrdin claimed the Russian side had been transparent but the Ukrainian side had not. The German ambassador retorted that the situation was more complicated than Chernomyrdin's characterization. Chernomyrdin said

Russia's primary interest was to put the gas supply arrangement on a market footing. The British, German, and Canadian ambassadors said that, while a desire for market prices was legitimate, price increases needed to be gradual. Chernomyrdin responded, "Your countries are rich, so why don't you support Ukraine."

16. (C) Ambassador observed that, if obtaining market pricing was Russia's motivation, then prices of Russian gas to other countries, such as Belarus, should have risen, too. If there had been no political overtones, then Russian television would not have broadcast the shut-off of the valve regulating the natural gas supply to Ukraine. Chernomyrdin acknowledged that the broadcast should not have occurred, but it had happened.

Iran

17. (C) The European ambassadors expressed their concern over Iran's nuclear intentions and the possibility that the situation could spin out of control. When Chernomyrdin said that perhaps they should address their concerns to the U.S. ambassador, Ambassador observed that the situation with Iran might not have reached a point requiring action by the international community if some countries (i.e., Russia) had not agreed to provide their advanced nuclear technology to Iran.

The Russian Residence

18. (SBU) Note: Chernomyrdin's residence (85/17 Vyshhorodskaya Street) is located in a nine-acre, sylvan setting, with a brook running through it, next to the Ukrainian foreign minister's official residence. The primary residence is a grand country manor, while another largish house is located near the entrance to the grounds. The house, which once belonged to a wealthy Ukrainian-American, is equipped with a movie theater with photographs of the likes of Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. When Ambassador, tongue in cheek, remarked on the displays of famous Russian actors, Chernomyrdin, who has no ear for irony, sought to correct him, saying the photographs were of American actors.

19. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.

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